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## Hearing Shows Problem of Identity Theft

**LANSING** — Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt, said Tuesday's Judiciary Committee hearing on the growing crime of identity theft shows that the Senate must act quickly to protect Michigan residents.

At the hearing, identity theft victims and law-enforcement officials explained the problems they face in dealing with the crime that law-enforcement officials call one of the nation's fastest-growing offenses.

"I found the testimony of the victims to be sobering," said Cropsey, who chairs the committee. "Their experiences show how easily people can steal your name and leave you with thousands of dollars of debt to pay off. We need to make it easier for victims to clear their names and we need to make sure police officers can open investigations in identity-theft fraud instances."

Cropsey said the committee is expected to take up identity-theft protection legislation next week.

Identity theft victims Chip St. Clair and Richard Hipple, both of Oakland County, told senators how they had their personal information taken and used to open fraudulent loan, credit card and cell phone accounts. In St. Clair's case, he was left to pay back thousands of dollars in loans and still has problems with his credit cards despite how he proved years ago that he wasn't responsible for the charges. Both had problems getting the major credit reporting agencies to fix their credit records.

Representatives from the Michigan State Police and the Attorney General Mike Cox's office also said a major impediment to fighting identity theft was having the legal ability to investigate and prosecute the criminals.